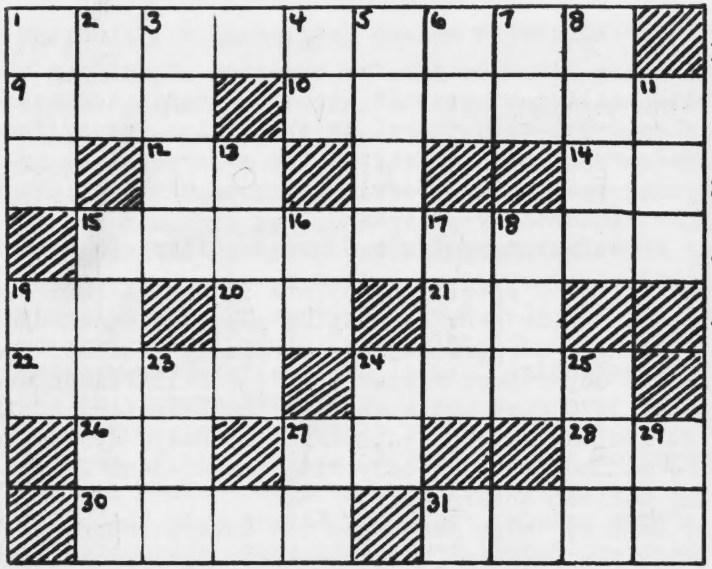

DOWN

1. Controversial suffix acquired by NRPC (Latin)
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3. Rail slippage preventative
4. Phone exchange of Island Tug & Barge (Abbr.)
5. Worried railowners frequently feel nationalization is this

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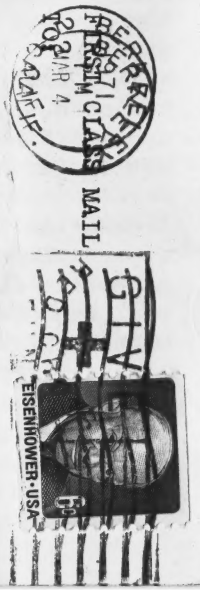
Solution next issue (Mar. 15)



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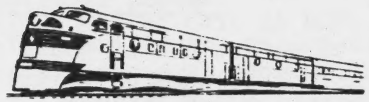
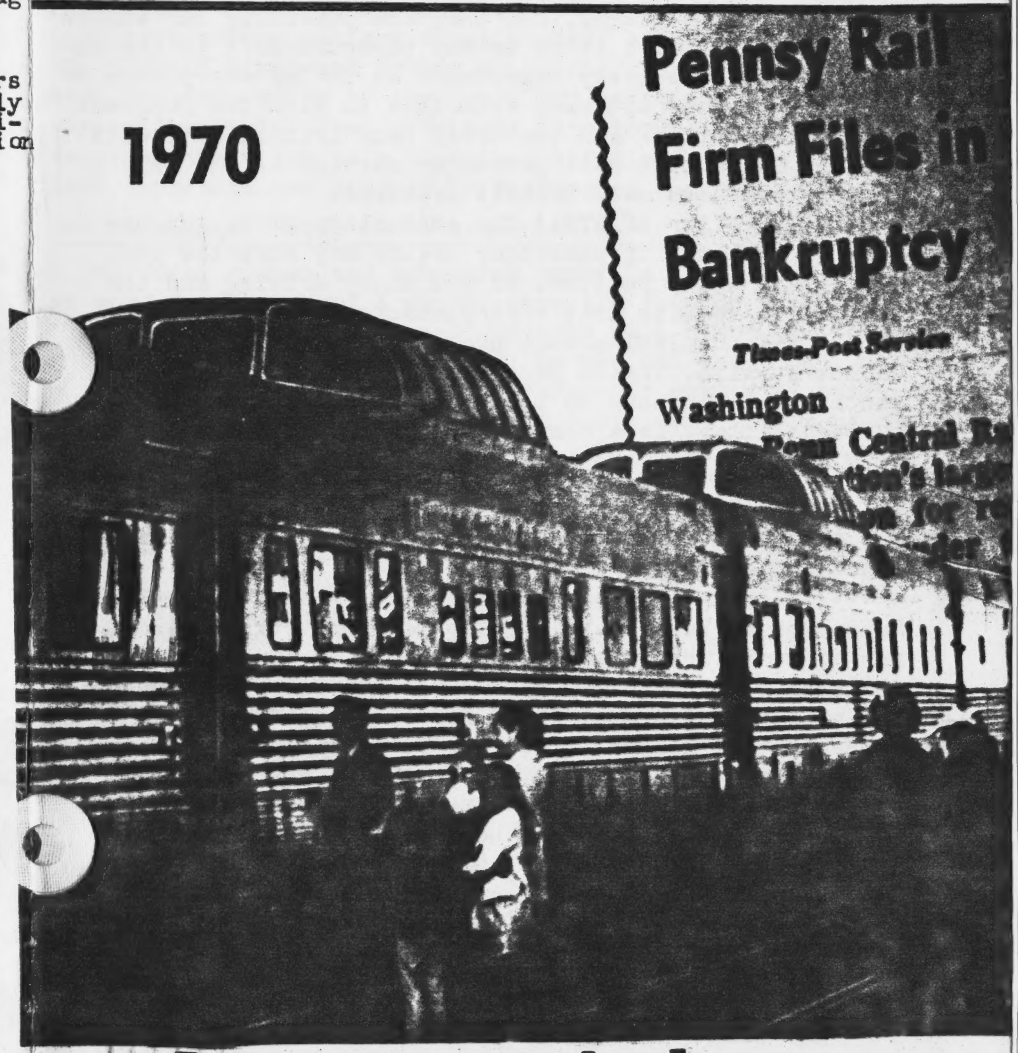
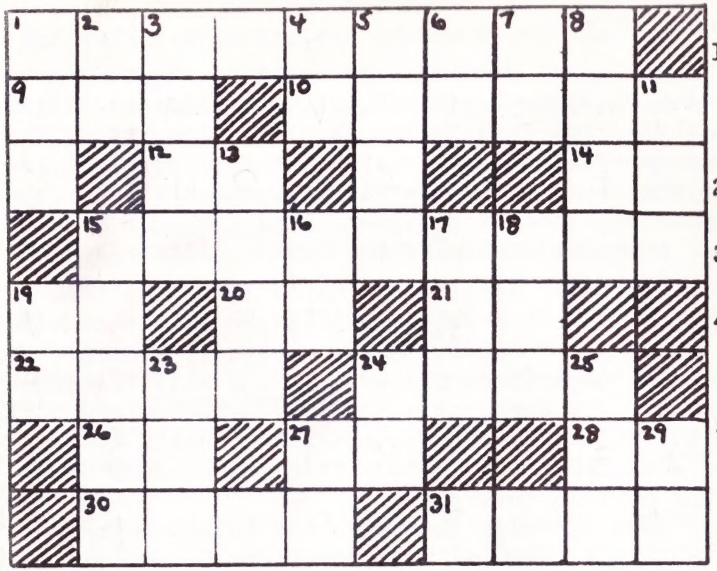


Volume 1 March 1, 1971 Number 7



It was a very bad year



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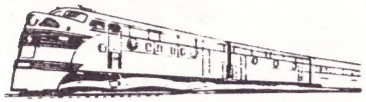

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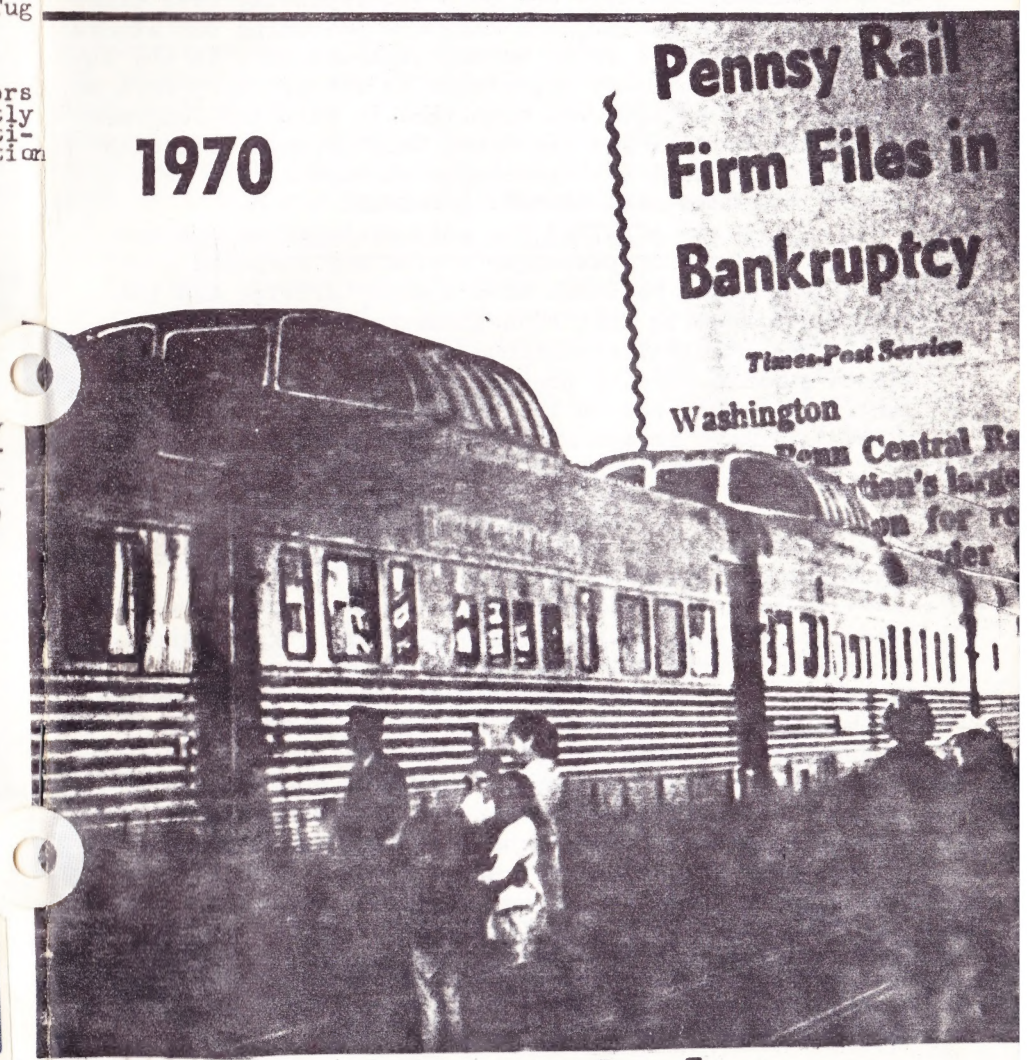

It was a very bad year

LETTERS

FROM AN OPEN LETTER TO THE READING RAILROAD:

I am not one of those romantic railroaders who insist on continuance of trains out of reverence for the past. I am only 29--there's not much past for me to remember. The facts, however, are plain: America is ready for unprecedented use of high speed ground transport, simply because other modes we once thought would replace trains --the car and bus--have multiplied too rapidly. Driving a car--though I love to drive and am an automotive editor by profession--is today less of a pleasure and more of a headache. Not only are cars statistically five times as dangerous as trains, but they are poisoning our atmosphere, and if there is to be any pleasure left in the automobile our top-heavy dependence on it for every form of movement must be altered. With this in mind the Congress has passed Railpax and the Urban Mass Transit Act, with the knowledge that rail passenger service is the only answer to modern mass transit problems.

(To the editor of RTN:) The enthusiasm of an automotive journalist for passenger trains may surprise you, but I have ample reasons. We who enjoy driving and the automobile realize that such pleasures, if highway growth and population continue at their present rates, cannot survive. Trains provide a viable alternative to continued dependence on the automobile, and if Railpax succeeds, there is a chance that the joys of driving will also survive. Best of luck in your endeavors.

Richard M. Langworth
Associate Editor,
Automobile Quarterly

New York, New York

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Subscribe to Rail Travel Newsletter for yourself and for gifts to friends. One year is $4.00--less than 17¢ an issue. Introductory gift subscriptions for friends are available for just $2.00 for six months (twelve twice-monthly issues) or $4 for 24 issues if you're feeling especially generous. Just send your money, with a note indicating whether each subscription is a gift or regular so we will be sure to inform the gift recipient of your thoughtfulness, to Message Media, Dept. RTN, P.O. Box 9007, Berkeley, Calif. 94709 U.S.A.

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Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 7, March 1, 1971. Published twice monthly, on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, by Message Media, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 USA. 25¢ an issue; $4 a year. Editor: James Russell.

Railpax Directors Discount Rail Passenger Losses

The 8 directors of Railpax (see RTN Jan. 4) are reportedly unimpressed by railroads' estimates of passenger revenue losses. Board chairman David Kendall, a former vice president of Chrysler, is quoted as saying "Nobody knows exactly what those loss figures meant." First-class service and marketing can offset lost patronage due to deliberate discouragement of passengers, he feels. According to the N.Y. Times the addition of S.P.'s route in the West and Southwest indicates that Railpax has discounted loss figures reported. The road said it lost over $5 million in 1969 on the Portland-Los Angeles and L.A.-New Orleans runs. Excitement and optimism are found among the directors as they select final routes, hunt for a president (W. Willard Wirtz and Arthur J. Goldberg are among those who have declined offer of the job), and negotiate contracts with the railroads involved. Various directors enthusiastically describe their job as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and the most important new project in Washington since the New Deal.

New Passenger Routes to be Announced Early in April

The final routes and schedules under Railpax will probably be announced in about a month, says the Federal Railroad Administration. There will not suddenly be a brand new fleet of trains May 1, but schedules will be new and about half the present trains will be dropped. Passenger cars will carry the lettering "Railpax" rather than an individual road's name. Railpax will advertise the trains, set fares, distribute timetables and issue tickets. A nationwide reservation network based upon the airline system is planned. Food service is being planned with help from American Airlines. Railpax must by law show a profit, so final schedules will depend both on population of an area and condition of the tracks.

NARP Wins Court Victory in Attempt to Drop the "Piedmont"

The New York-Atlanta "Piedmont", operated by Penn Central and Southern Railway, was the subject of an attempted discontinuance. The National Association of Rail Passengers went to a Federal court in Washington, assisted by the state of Pennsylvania and railway unions, and obtained a restraining order late in February, arguing that Congress' intent in passing the Railpax bill was to call a halt to train-offs until Railpax becomes operative. A PC official then said: "We shall continue them (long-distance trains) until the DOT determines what service it will provide under its 'Railpax' proposals."

No March 1 Railroad Strike

Progress in negotiations with the United Transportation Union was being made as we went to press, and the threatened March 1 nationwide rail strike was not called. Hopefully an agreement will have been reached by the time you read this. Still up in the air is the scheduled March 5 strike by Railroad Signalmen. This could be delayed until May 5--just after Railpax gets into operation--by Presidential action.

Scrutinize Rail Transportation Needs, Says NARP

The National Association of Railroad Passengers, San Francisco Region, will prepare a comprehensive report on California's transportation needs and how they can be met under the Railpax system. A public meeting to discuss the future of trains in the state will be held Mar. 19 at 7:30 PM at San Francisco's Clift Hotel. Interested individuals are invited.

Postscript to Weather and the Trains

RTN's comment in the Winter Travel article (Feb.1) that Winter will continue awhile proved an understatement. But the Old Farmer's Almanac was right. An extraordinarily heavy storm began in the Texas Panhandle the night of Feb. 20 and roared 24 hours before moving northeastward to paralyze towns and traffic in the Plains and Midwest states. East of the snow area appeared the violent Mississippi and Louisiana tornadoes that killed scores. In Texas 3 highway patrolmen and unknown other motorists were stranded in the snow the morning of Feb. 21. No rescue vehicles could reach them, but as they were 30 yards from the Rock Island tracks near Groom, trainmen kept a lookout to pick them up. Snowdrifts were head-high and wind gusts up to 50 mph. Road and air traffic was paralyzed, and when the storm cleared motorists were found dead of asphyxiation and of icy road crashes. The same day, the storm blanketed Oklahoma and Kansas, stifling all traffic. It was rails to the rescue again as Southern Pacific sent out special trains to pick up stranded drivers, the first such event in 30 years. The Midwest was hit next and travelers were warned off numerous Interstate highways. Many hundreds were stranded.

On 3 occasions in late Feb. hurricane-velocity winds struck Southern California, creating zero visibility from flying sand and forcing the closing of state and Interstate highways. Feb. 20 winds in Utah's Wasatch Mountains blew 10 cars of a 136-car freight train off the tracks, while power went out in Ogden. Barstow was reported full of stranded motorists and hospitals full of auto accident victims. Winds caused a 25-car crash on a freeway north of Lancaster, Calif. on Feb. 19. The Farmer's Almanac predicts more bad weather for March.

Chronology of Rail Events 1970

1970 indeed was a very bad year for rail travelers. Railroading sank to its lowest point in memory. In train-off petitions alone the year must have established a record. In fact a whole volume might be devoted just to chronicling the maneuvers of the railroads and the public agencies to either eliminate or save the remnants of remaining passenger service.

There's a saying that things have to get worse before they can get better. Surely that aphorism applied to 1970 train travel. When things looked darkest, the apparently inevitable happened and Congress came up with a bill designed to revive train travel by creating a semi-public corporation, the National Rail Passenger Corporation, to take over operation of the varnish starting in Spring 1971. Thus the year ended with a note of hope and expectancy that things would improve, tho the hope was mixed with anxiety that the corporation's announced beginning plan was too meager and would be virtually no plan at all. Somehow that ending to the year seemed appropriate in light of all that went before. It allowed us to begin 1971 with an upswing...but that is another story that cannot be told for another year.

Besides train-offs other important events occurred in railroad land in 1970. Biggest news of course was the bankruptcy of Penn Central. And that is a story too complicated to begin to do justice to here. Future authors will spend many hours researching the topic with fascination and perhaps horror. But clearly the event profoundly affected the future of railroads in America, and the ultimate outcome cannot yet be known.

Much of the impact of Penn Central's bankruptcy was symbolic. It dramatized financial difficulties occurring in other roads as well, and indeed in other organizations in hard money times. It raised eyebrows and caused questioners to ask who would be the next to go.

Symbolic too was the demise of the California Zephyr. It was really just another of the long list of trains discontinued over the past decade or more, but something about it made it special enough that news media around the nation reported it as an historical event. It was not just transportation between Chicago and San Francisco--after all, two other trains remained to do that job. It was, though, the sexiest train around, and offered some glamour and excitement that now are rarely associated with intercity travel.

(continued page 8)

1970 — 1970

January

2 "Transportation" replaced "Railroads" in Dow Jones Averages
4 Last runs of EL "Lake Cities"
23 Last runs of Milw "Afternoon Hiawathas"
24 President Nixon rode the Metroliner
Ass't to Pres. of IC killed in grade crossing collision of "City of New Orleans"
27 SCL "Gulf Coast Special" derailed near Alexandria, Va., killing 3
31 Last run of SR "Royal Palm"

February

2 Supreme Court approved merger to create BN

March

2 Merger of CB&Q, GN, NP, and SP&S into BN effective
4 PC attempts to drop 48 trains west of Buffalo and Harrisburg
10 Six-day wildcat strike on SP ended
11 Trainload of bombs derailed at Aurora, Nebraska; no injuries
21 Last run of WP "California Zephyr"
22 SP "City of San Francisco" begins tri-weekly service
28 Guy Hardy, chief engineer on last CZ run, killed in WP-SP freight collision

April

12 BN drops last Chicago-Milwaukee night trains, the "Black Hawk"

May

6 Senate approved Railpax bill
10 ATSF "San Francisco Chief" derailed at Riverbank, Calif.
19 Union filed suit to prevent PC from running diesels in tunnels under New York
25 CN resumed Montreal-Toronto Turbotrain service

June

21 PC filed for reorganization under bankruptcy laws
Crescent City, Ill. evacuated when liquefied petroleum exploded in derailment
30 U.S. railroads' return on net investment was 1.88%, lowest since 1938

July

7 One-day wildcat strike against SP, B&O, and L&N
25 SP Sunset Route blocked 24 hours by derailment at Benson, Ariz.
27 New Haven commute train stalls in smoky tunnel; 1000 passengers escape
CP dropped four trains out of Montreal

August

1 SP "Cascade" began tri-weekly operation
2 One person died in stalled New York subway train
10 Nerve gas train began to move through the South

September

1 ICC-approved 10% passenger fare increase became effective
William Moore became new president of PC
5 D&RGW Silverton line track washed out, closed for rest of year
NWP "Redwood" cut to bi-weekly service
7 Last run of Milw "Pioneer Limited"
14 Eighteen-hour wildcat strike against SP and C&O/B&O

October

1 ICC rejected 20 of 34 PC train-off petitions
2 SP "Sunset" began tri-weekly operation
14 House of Representatives approved Railpax bill
19 SR-SP coast-to-coast sleeper operation began

November

7 BN dedicated Flathead Tunnel in Montana, nation's second longest (7 miles)
23 PC asked Congress for a loan to stay in cash
25 PC commuter train stalled in smoky tunnel
30 DOT Secretary Volpe announced preliminary Railpax passenger train network

December

1 Alfred Perlman became president of WP
10 One-day nationwide railroad strike
22 Nat'l Transportation Safety Board suggested seat belts on trains
California PUC granted 10% intrastate fare increase
29 ICC asked Volpe to enlarge the initial Railpax system
31 Chicago's Railroad Transfer Service was discontinued

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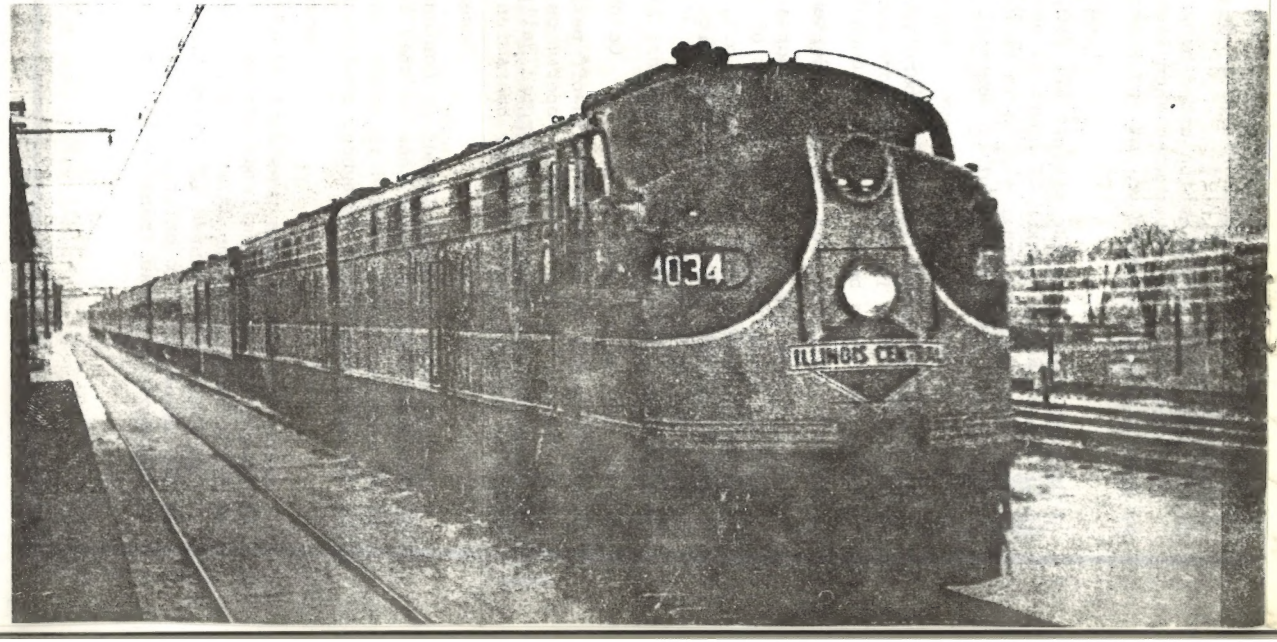
People need excitement in their travel as much as they need safety, and even more so in these times of predictably similar motels and dull airlines that argue over which has an inch more legroom between rowed-up seats. The Zephyr's cars were rougher riding than the City of San Francisco's, but an over-six footer could easily stretch out in them, and those domes and that service were something you didn't forget quickly. The Zephyr was a lesson in railroad travel that the present planners of Railpax should heed. Dull transportation will eventually be rejected. You don't sell autos by talking about the endless miles of monotonous concrete they traverse. You picture them at their finest, usually in fantasied settings that can be promised but not delivered. Most youngsters are growing up without experiencing the real excitement that good train travel can create. But European travelers return home with pictures of exciting trains, and they want them here. It is inevitable that they will get them too. There's no keeping back an idea that has reached its time.

In the accompanying chronology of 1970 railroad events we've necessarily had to be selective, picking those we felt important. There undoubtedly are omissions. We couldn't cover all the train-offs, and found it hard to keep track of New York commuter incidents. Then there were attempted train-offs that didn't come off, some because of Railpax, like the IC Panama Limited pictured below. We suggest recent issues of Passenger Train Journal for further compilations of train-off petitions.

Most of the 1970 news seemed to be bad. Some wasn't, at least from some viewpoints. The creation of Burlington Northern from the merger of four roads is an example. For the admirer of size and power BN is exciting. For many rail travelers its advent was marked primarily by a change of attitude towards some fine passenger trains and more power and leverage aimed at eliminating them.

What will 1971 bring? Surely the next chronology will be bigger. And it will have to be better--it could scarcely be worse.



COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

Air Cushion Train Demonstration Project

An International Transportation Exposition at Dulles International Airport near Washington will be held in May 1972. By then, Secretary Volpe announced in mid-February, the DOT hopes to have a 150-mph air cushion train running between the airport and suburban Washington. The project, run by the Urban Mass Transit Administration of DOT, will cost $20 to $25 million, and will be officially a demonstration project to test passengers' reactions to this type of system already in use in Europe. The electric motored train is noiseless and pollution-free. It rides in a U-shaped concrete channel, raising itself an inch above the channel by compressed air. A similar system is hopefully planned for Los Angeles, connecting its airport with downtown and San Fernando Valley points. New York-Washington and San Francisco-Los Angeles are 2 more candidates for corridors that might use these vehicles. A major problem is that nearly straight-line routes are needed, and these are expensive to acquire in cities.

For Want of a Strand the Cable Was Lost...

A weird accident involving 5 San Francisco cable cars happened on Powell St. in late afternoon Feb. 26, and 2 Muni gripmen blamed it on substandard cables. One of 6 cable strands broke, rolled itself into a ball, and dragged a cable car along, crashing it into 4 other cars. Two gripmen were slightly injured. The cars were empty of passengers except the last, which was loading at the turntable near Market St. Passengers leapt to safety as the 4 jammed-together cars came rolling towards them.

Japan Leads World in Urban Transit Planning

Tokyo is one of the world's most polluted cities, but this condition will change if Japanese planners realize their aim of banning internal combustion cars and converting to computerized electric cars on self-guiding roadways. Computerized subway trains, moving sidewalks, passenger capsules on conveyor belts, and auto-free pedestrian promenades will complete the picture. The electronic highway network in Tokyo would cost several billions, but could be paid in 5 years if users paid only $1 a day, an amount comparable to current commute costs.

BACK ISSUES of RTN are available in very limited quantity at 25¢ each, 5 for $1. Issues 1-6 still available. Write: Message Media, Dept. RTN, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

EDITORIAL: WILL RAILPAX CHANGE RAILROADS' ATTITUDE?

As Railpax prepares to take over operation of the nation's passenger trains, a large question mark looms up. Will the negative attitude of some railroads toward passenger service continue to influence the way it is operated? This question is very pertinent in view of recent comments by Southern Pacific's President B. F. Biaggini that indicate no change in attitude toward passengers in spite of Railpax's relieving railroads of responsibility for service. The S.P.'s efforts to dissuade government officials from enlarging the original Railpax network also reflect its lack of enthusiasm for the semi-public corporation.

Railroads will probably be in a position to sabotage Railpax if they desire. After all, the corporation must use the roads' rails and other facilities. So far some railroads have spared no effort, either subtle or blatant, to discourage passengers. What incentive do the roads have for cooperating with Railpax? Do they see it as merely a step toward nationalization? If they are wise, which is doubtful judging from past experience, they will cooperate with Railpax in order to preclude any further pressure to nationalize the rails. If they are not, they will attempt to downgrade the corporation to financial failure, a move which would only result in public pressure for a more radical government intervention to obtain needed service.

Bad Order

(Introducing an occasional corner of gripes and criticism)

Long Island Railroad Chaotic, Audit Finds

New York state had an independent audit done of LIRR's operations, and the results were released Feb. 17. They showed that the railroad is losing $9.4 million yearly because non-punchable tickets allow about 670,000 riders each month to get through without paying. Auditors urged a return to punched tickets that are less easily counterfeited. Besides this problem, there were accounting laxities uncovered. The road's multi-million dollar checking account had not been balanced for a year. About 24,000 checks sat in an unlocked vault. Employees arrived late and left early and used their private cars excessively on company business. The MTA, owner of the line, received the report in good spirit and promised to improve the road's financial management.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"While Congress has provided for creation of Railpax and allotted $140 million to sustain it, the Congressional involvement should not stop there. In the coming years, funds should be made available to Railpax for major capital improvements and experimental services beyond those which can reasonably be financed by Railpax."

--Passenger Train Journal editorial, Winter

"The possibility of specifying points in Canada (and Mexico) as points to which service must be provided by the National Rail Passenger Corporation was carefully studied. However, it is the department's view that the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 does not authorize the Secretary of Transportation to include foreign points in the basic system. Such service can be provided only with the consent of the Canadian and Mexican Governments.

Secretary John A. Volpe has urged the incorporators to negotiate with the Canadian Government for agreements that will enable the corporation to provide service to Montreal and Vancouver and with the Mexican Government to enable service to that country through Laredo, Texas."

--DOT official quoted in N.Y. Times, Feb. 21

HOW TO KILL A PASSENGER TRAIN No. 7 of a series

Dealing with the railfan is one of the most critical elements in efficient passenger train elimination. The average traveler is easily discouraged. Once you've removed palatable food, created inhospitable stations, drawn up impossible schedules, eliminated every service--in short, done all the obvious and many of the more subtle things that tell passengers to get lost, you may still find yourself stuck with a number of rail buffs who not only persist in riding trains but also actively encourage others to do so, and who are the first to complain publicly about your passenger removal operations. However, all is not lost. One fairly surefire way of handling these strange and often psychotic individuals is to kill them with kindness. Railfans usually have a passion for special excursion trips. The best plan is to cooperate fully in arranging these. They tend to mollify the rail fanatic so he pays less attention to your regular passenger trains. After all, no money is lost on a few excursions a year--they're far better than regular daily trains--and with the buff quieted, the day will arrive sooner when your normal service is gone, your varnish sold, and you can declare your rails suitable for freight only. Excursions will be ruled out, and you can concentrate upon the real business of railroading--diversification.